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A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES



ALICE CARRY VERNER

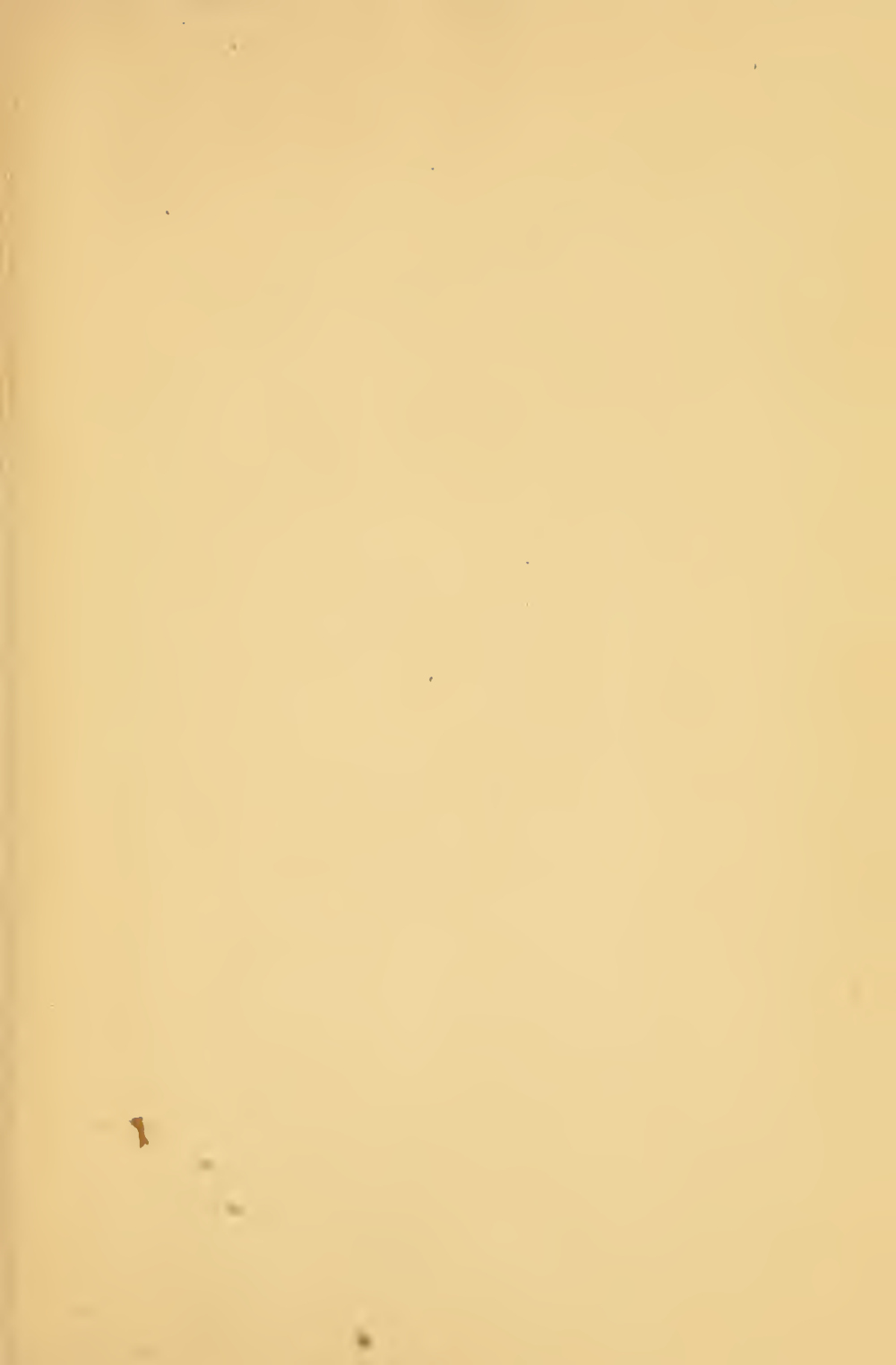


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A HANDFUL OF
AUTUMN LEAVES

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BY
ALICE CARRY VERNER

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
NOVEMBER	11
DESERTED	12
WINE AND RUE	14
LE PRINTEMPS	16
WHERE SHE SLEEPS	17
THE DISCONTENTED ROSE	18
IN MOUNTAIN SHADES	21
MY FRIEND	22
A DREAM	23
SANCTA SIMPLICITAS	25
MAMMY (A Song)	27
LI'L LOS' LAM'	28
"DE SABIOUR GOES ———"	29
AIRERPLANES	30
THE REPROOF	32
A TRIP "BACK HOME"	33
"I KNOW A BANK"	37
INVOCATION	38
THE YEARS	39
POVERTY'S LITANY	40
UNKNOWN	41
A CHILD'S SONG OF SPRING	42
TO SLEEP	43

	PAGE
DREAMS (To my sister)	44
"CHIMMIE" ON SANTA CLAUS	46
THE DIFFERENCE	48
THE VOYAGE	50
LANG SYNE	51
LOVE'S YEARNING	52
FATE	53
YE OLDEN VALENTYNE	54
MY LADY	55
BEREFT	56
LONGING	57
AT EVENTIDE	58
MEMORIES	61
THE DAME AND THE MAID	64
TOO LATE!	68
DE PROFUNDIS	69
REMORSE	74
TWO WOMEN	76
MAGDALEN	81

“ Go forth and bring us flowers,” they said,

“ Of radiant hue.”

But autumn leaves I brought instead,

Entwined with rue.

DEDICATED

TO THAT ONE WHOSE HONEST CRITICISM AND KINDLY
WORDS OF PRAISE MOST HAVE HELPED
AND ENCOURAGED ME

For permission to reprint several of
the poems used in this book thanks
are due to the "Simmons Magazine."

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

NOVEMBER

The skies are leaden gray, the wild geese call
Their watchword as they fly to sunnier shores;
Within the wood the ripe nuts clattering fall,
And chattering squirrels gather winter stores.

The sere leaves have a sad and mournful sound
As, shaken by the dreary Autumn wind,
In scattering droves they rustle to the ground
Interment 'neath the winter snows to find.

The setting sun no golden glory throws
Athwart the west; no gleam of vivid red,
Ribbons of shining copper or pale rose,
But sullen sinks into a cheerless bed.

The dusk falls early, and the slim, young moon
Shines fitfully from out a misty sky;
The chill wind rising whines an eerie tune,
The dark wood echoes to the owlet's cry.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

DESERTED

A brown old house, long left forlorn,
To dream and drowse the hours away,
With empty rooms, and fireless hearth;
Uncared for—battered—old and gray.

Gaunt, dismal, seamed with age, it stands,
With sagging roof, and walls agape,
With broken windows, shrunken floors;
A dim and solitary shape.

Across the walks the grass has grown,
The garden now is choked with weeds,
And thick, where flowers used to bloom,
The thistle drops its plummy seeds.

Beside the wall a lilac bush
Bends low across a rustic seat;
Long since, a youth and maiden sat
And whispered love in this retreat.

Across its gnarled and knotted limbs,
The spider now her dwelling weaves,
And damp upon the rustic seat
Lie heaps of russet Autumn leaves.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

And desolation breathes o'er all;
A ghostly presence seemeth near,
And thro' the rustling of the leaves
A whisper falls upon the ear.

A whisper that makes sad the heart;
A ghostly voice that seems to say:
“ Here, once, was love, and life, and mirth;
The end of all is but decay! ”

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

WINE AND RUE

This day, this dreamy day in early Spring,
I've drunk the mingled cup of wine and rue,
That memory of the happy past will bring—
The past, so full of you.

One of life's many chances led my feet
Back to the spot that was my early home,
Where my life opened; little dreamed we then
How far my steps would roam!

Still bloomed the flowers 'round that deserted place,
Still did the climbing roses frame the door;
But from the threshold no familiar face
Smiled on me as of yore.

Like to the haunting fragrance of a flower,
That lingers when its beauty all has flown,
Sad memories came thronging in that hour,
As I stood there alone.

And backward gazing o'er life's somber sea,
To where the hills of youth shine fresh and green,
I thought of all my life once promised me,
And all it might have been.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

I turned away and sought the little brook,
That still o'er shining pebbles danced and sung;
Wild flowers starred the grape-embowered nook
We loved when we were young.

The bluebells swayed upon their slender stalks,
The songbirds caroled still, the livelong day,
And purple violets fringed the grassy walks,
Where oft we used to play.

The path led on across the shady leas,
To the old churchyard, where my loved ones sleep
In holy quiet, while the dark yew-trees
A solemn vigil keep.

O loved and lost! I felt their presence nigh,
And yearned to clasp them to my lonely heart;
I stretched my arms out with a bitter cry—
Empty, they fell apart.

Oh, sweet, dead past! with pleasure ye were rife,
But now your shadow falls upon my soul.
Shall it be lifted never more in life,
While the long years may roll?

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

LE PRINTEMPS

To-day a bluebird, harbinger of Spring,
Flew past my window, perched upon a tree,
And there, with lightsome heart, began to sing,
And this is what he seemed to say to me:

“ Winter is past, and lo, the Spring is come;
Light-footed Spring, all garlanded with flowers;
Green are the meadows, and the tuneful hum
Of bees awakened fills the lengthening hours.

“ Hearts, too, awake, and throb in tune to all
The joy, the melody, the hope of Spring;
Man seeks his mate, and I to mine do call
With heart so full of love I can but sing! ”

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

WHERE SHE SLEEPS

In a leafy forest glade,
Where a tall oak casts its shade,
Sleeps a maiden fair;
Low she sleeps—sweetly sleeps—
Where the dark wild ivy creeps—
Sleeps, and knows no care.

O'er her heaps the grassy sod,
And the starry daisies nod
Gently to and fro
In the Summer winds, that sigh
Nature's plaintive lullaby,
Where she lieth low.

Where, beneath the star-strewn skies,
Pale flowers lift their wistful eyes,
Deep in dew to lave,
There she sleeps—sweetly sleeps—
Knowing naught of one who weeps
O'er her lonely grave.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

THE DISCONTENTED ROSE

A wild rose grew in a sheltered nook,
Budded and blossomed, all unseen,
Save by the birds that built their nests
The fragrant blooms between.

The soft Spring winds blew lovingly,
Coaxing the buds into perfect bloom,
And bee and butterfly lingered there,
Lured by the sweet perfume.

But the little rose drooped her lovely head
In discontent, and her heart was sad,
Nor wooing winds nor gentle dews
Could ever make her glad.

Nor thought she of the happy birds
That safely dwelt amid her bowers,
Nor cared she for the bees that sipped
Sweet honey from her flowers.

But, " Oh, to be out in the world! " she moaned,
" The beautiful world, so fair and wide!
Why should I bloom, from year to year,
With none to see? " she sighed.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

“ The changing seasons come and go,
The glad, sweet summers wax and wane,
The idle winds destroy my flowers;
My life is all in vain! ”

.
The years went by till came a day
When, loitering far from haunts of men,
One from the City's busy throng
Came to the mossy glen.

And seeing the little rose blooming there,
Sweet and fair 'neath the cloudless sky,
He longed to take it away with him,
Daily to glad his eye.

So he carried the rose to his city home,
And planted it there in a garden small,
Where the sun shone seldom, and thick and murky,
The smoke lay over all.

But she pined away in that garden drear,
Where no trees grew, and never was heard
Hum of insect, nor flutter of wings,
Nor ever the song of a bird.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

She missed the blue of the wide, free sky,
She missed the kiss of the warm, bright sun,
And ere the frosts of Autumn came
Her little life was done.

Withered and dying, she sadly thought
Of the cool, green dell, and the quiet life,
Where never voices of men were heard,
Nor ever the sound of strife.

And her sick heart yearned to be back again
In the grassy nook, where of old she sighed
For a wider life, in a world unknown,
And yearning thus, she died.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

IN MOUNTAIN SHADES

Thro' the pines the whispering zephyrs
 Softly blow,
And the branches gently waver
 To and fro;
O'er the grass the quivering shadows
 Come and go.

In the sunlight, gayest blossoms
 Gleam and glow;
To his mate a wild bird calleth,
 Soft and low;
Of what wondrous things he singeth
 None may know.

Tired hearts, in sorrow beating,
 Sad and slow,
Come where Nature ever speaketh
 Sweet and low;
Peace will here enfold thy spirit . . .
 Even so.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

MY FRIEND

One friend I have, so leal, so dear, so true,
No cloud can ever come between us twain;
Friendship like ours is given to but few,
Tho' many seek it all their lives, in vain.

Dear Margaret, none else can ever fill
Or take the place you hold within my heart!
And well I know we shall be friends until
Death, calling one, shall beckon us apart.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

A DREAM

Last night I saw in a happy dream
The dear old home again,
As it was in the past—as I saw it last—
Thro' tears that fell like rain.

The booming of bees was on the air,
And the sun shone bright as of yore,
While the humming bird dipped, and lightly sipped
From the jasmine over the door.

Old Jack, the house-dog, lay on the step
And lazily blinked his eye,
Seeming to say, "Tho' I doze this way,
I see every passer-by!"

And Grandma sat in her high-backed chair,
Singing an old-time hymn,
While the stocking she knit grew, bit by bit,
As the needles flew out and in.

And Mother, too, was standing there,
In her trim, old-fashioned gown—
So tidy and neat, so quaint and sweet,
With her hair smoothed softly down—

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

All but a few rebellious curls,
That age could not subdue,
And they lent a grace to the fair old face,
Tho' she was turned sixty-two.

And Father paced the garden walk,
As he used in the long ago,
For he always said he loved each bed,
And "liked to see things grow."

And then it seemed it was eventide,
And the shadows gathered fast,
And a thick, gray cloud came like a shroud
And folded away the past.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

SANCTA SIMPLICITAS

A simple village maid is she,
A little maiden fair to see,
 So dainty, small and slender;
A look of timid, shy surprise
Lurks in the depths of her sweet eyes—
 Blue eyes, down-dropped and tender.

An aureole of golden hair,
Not smooth, for all her tidy care,
 Beneath a white straw bonnet,
Peeps out in soft, bewitching rings,
And round her neck caressing clings,
 The sunlight gleaming on it.

While on her breast a rose she pins
She thinks of all her girlish sins,
 And hopes they are forgiven;
A greater sinner well might pray
To be as pure as she, to-day;
 As sure of God and Heaven.

A Sabbath stillness reigns o'er all,
The breezes shake the lime trees tall,

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

And one lone bird is singing
A song of praise, clear and profound;
In rhythmic waves of solemn sound
The old church bell is ringing.

She walks across the meadow sweet,
The yellow cowslips kiss her feet,
The zephyrs soft caress her;
The village church is now her goal,
No thought of guile is in her soul;
No worldly cares oppress her.

Now in the church she bows her head
A moment, till her prayers are said—
An earnest, short petition—
A prayer for faith and strength and love,
For help and guidance from above,
To fill her earthly mission.

O sweetest maid, long may you live
Comfort and happiness to give
To all the hearts that love you!
And when in earth you're laid to rest,
Hands meekly folded on your breast,
Heartsease should bloom above you.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

M A M M Y

(*A Song*)

I's thinkin' to-night o' yo', Mammy,
An' yo' love, so kin' an' true,
When I was a chile at yo' knee, Mammy,
An' nevah a sorrow knew.

But now I am ol' an' gray, Mammy,
An' my heart so full o' pain,
That I'd give all the worl', to-night, Mammy,
Jes' t' see yo' once again.

Jes' fo' t' feel yo' arms, Mammy,
Close, close erroun' me prest,
An' t' lay my ol' gray head, Mammy,
Erpon yo' faithful breast.

'Tis long sence yo' lef' me heah, Mammy,
But I ain't fo'got yo', no;
An' I longs fo' t' heah yo' voice, Mammy,
Speakin' t' me, sof' an' low.

Oh, I know yo' would comfo't me, Mammy,
As yo' did in chil'hood days,
An' soothe all my sorrow away, Mammy,
An' that's why t'-night I prays

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Jes' fo' t' feel yo' arms, Mammy,
Close, close erroun' me prest,
An' t' lay my ol' gray head, Mammy,
Erpon yo' faithful breast.

LI'L LOS' LAM'

Oh, yo' li'l los' lam',
Wand'rin' far f'um de fol',
Out in de night an' de sto'm—
Out in de win' an' de col'—

Wounded an' to'n by de tho'ns,
Hopeless, an' tremblin' with feah—
Oh, yo' li'l los' lam'!
Call, an' de Shephe'd will heah.

Oh, my po' li'l lam'!
Oh, my li'l los' chile!
Out in de da'kness an' sto'm—
Los' in de tempes' so wil'—

Come tuh yo' own mammy's ahms,
Lay yo' tiahed haid on mah bre's';
Oh, my li'l los' lam'!
Come tuh yo' mammy an' res'.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

“ DE SABIOUR GOES — ”

De Sabiour goes f'um day ter day,
Ter de rich an' ter de po',
An' He stan' in de win', an' he stan' in de rain,
An' He knock erpon de do';
(Oh, heah Him knock!)

An' er “ Lemme in! O lemme in! ”
De bressed Lo'd He say;
“ Lemme inter de house—lemme inter yo' hea't—
An' Ise sup wid yo' ter-day! ”
(Oh, a-let Him in!)

But de do' hit close', an' de do' hit lock',
An' de Lo'd He go erway,
An' He speak no mo' ter de sinful Soul
Untwel de Jedgemen' Day.
(Oh, call Him back!)

But Death *he* come, an' he knock but once
Erpon de fas' close' do',
An' de Soul go fo'th in de win' an' sto'm,
F'um de house hit needs no mo'!
(Po' Soul! no mo'!)

An' hit come ter de place whar de Angel stan',
An' hit beat erpon de gate;
Cryin', “ Lemme in! O lemme in! ”
But de ansah am, “ Too late! ”
(No use! Too late!)

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

AIRERPLANES

Deacon Brown wuz rakin' hay
In his medder-lot, one day,

When Si Jones, he stopped tew tell
Uv a airerplane that fell,

Smashin' up a man er two,
As most airerplanes *will* do

Ef you give 'em rope enough.
Si, he 'lowed 'twas purty tough

Tew to be soarin' like a bat,
Then tew hit the airth like that.

“ What do *you* think, Deacon Brown? ”
Si sez, pausin' tew set down

On a pile uv new-mown hay,
“ Uv this flyin' business? Eh! ”

Deacon Brown, he thought a bit,
Then he sez: “ In Holy Writ

Ain't a line that tells, nowhere,
Uv folks flyin' through the air;

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

('Ceptin' angels—which ain't men—
Flew to airth an' back agen.)

So I'm mighty shore," sez he,
" It wuz never meant tew be!

" Ef the Lord meant us tew fly,
Like the birds, around the sky,

He'd uv give us tails an' wings,
Same es other flyin' things;

But He didn't, so," sez he,
" It wuz never meant to be.

Walk, er ride, but tell you die,
Never, never, try tew fly! "

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

THE REPROOF

Yo' Washington Adolphus Snow!
Come in heah! Whut yo' mean,
A-frowin' stones at w'ite folks?
W'y, yo' match Ah nebbah seen!

Yo' brack, sassy li'l niggah,
Ain' yo' heah yo' mammy talk?
Oh, des wait twel Ah cotch yo', sah,
Ahs gwine er make yo' walk!

Yo' aggravatin' li'l limb,
Is Ah raise yo' up tuh fight?
Ain' yo' got no mannaahs? Ansah me!
Ain' Ah teach yo' right?

Whut? Call yo' niggah? Whut? an' say
Yo' mammy niggah, too?
An' yo'll stan' dar an' take dat!
Now Ah tells yo' whut Ah'll do;

Ef yo' don' go an' poun' dat boy,
Untwel he jes' cain' see,
Ahs gwine tuh stripe yo' jacket, good—
Dem trash cain' fool wid me!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

A TRIP " BACK HOME "

Took a trip, not long ago,
Clean back into Illinoy,
Where I use' t' live, you know,
When I was a little boy.

Guess it must be forty year
Sence I seen th' old place last;
Gee! how ever' little thing
Called up mem'ries o' th' past!

Yet, how ever'thing was changed,
Nuthin', hardly, seemed th' same;
Skeercely anybody left
That could call me by my name.

Some growed up an' went away;
Some lived in th' old homes still;
But, with heavy heart, I found
Most was buried on th' hill.

There I found th' names o' them
That I most had longed t' see;
Made my heart ache some t' read
" Sacred t' th' memory—"

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Uv th' ones that long ago
Use' t' go t' school with me.
Shed some tears, a-standin' there
By their graves, in memory . . .

It was long an' long ago,
Yet it seems but yeste'day,
Bob would come an' call t' me,
“ Hey, Bill! Can't you come an' play? ”

Or Len Jones would stop t' tell
How he killed a snake, then say,
“ Let's go in a-swimmin', Bill,
Water's nice an' warm t'-day! ”

But th' sweetest memory
Uv them fur-off days t' me—
One I never can furgit—
Is uv little Molly Lee.

Shet my eyes an' see her now,
Swingin' on our garden gate,
Callin' “ Hurry, Billy-boy,
School bell's ringin'—you'll be late! ”

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Never married—so I see
By th' tombstone at her head;
“Aged Sixteen,” it says, an' so,
Many a year she has been dead . . .

Left th' graveyard, an' went down
T' th' schoolhouse; same old one
Where I use' t' go, an' where
I have had a lot o' fun.

Ever' Friday we'd “choose up,”
Then we'd spell old Webster through;
Without boastin', I can say
Few could beat me—mighty few.

An' th' games we use' t' play,
In them good old days gone by,
Girls an' boys t'gether, there—
Say! that mem'ry made me cry! . . .

Left th' schoolhouse, an' went on
Down th' road until I come
T' th' river; even there,
Things, I found, was dif'rent, some.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Willers had choked up th' stream
 'Twixt th' island an' th' shore;
Couldn't take a boat an' row
 Straight acrost t' it no more.

Ever'thing so dif'rent-like—
 Nuthin' anywhere th' same;
Not a dozen people left
 That could call me by my name. . . .

Leavin' home is bad enough,
 How I felt I can't furgit,
When I left; but one thing shore—
 Goin' back is sadder yit.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

“ I KNOW A BANK ”

I know a bank whereon no “ wild thyme grows,”

But where the yellow primrose may be seen,
And where a tranquil streamlet silent flows
Thro’ reeds and rushes green.

Tall sycamores with silver-surfaced leaves
Lean o’er, as if to gaze into the stream,
And ’neath their shade, lulled by the whisp’ring
breeze,
I love to sit and dream.

Such wondrous visions come to me sometimes,
While sitting on this bank with folded hands;
On that small stream I sail to distant climes,
And travel many lands.

I gain the goal for which my soul doth pine,
Remember not the things I would forget;
Drifting in Dreamland, all the world is mine;
I waken with regret.

And with regret I tear myself away
From the fair castles I have reared in Spain—
That sunny land, whose skies are never gray—
And face my life again.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

INVOCATION

Father, my heart is sad—
No ray of light
Shineth to make me glad,
Or pierce the night

Of my despairing soul,
And over me
The murky waters roll,
An angry sea.

“ Vain, vain is earth-born hope! ”
My soul doth moan,
And in the dark I grope—
A spirit lone.

So lone and friendless, I,
With none to love;
O Saviour, be Thou nigh,
And from above

Look pityingly on me
Thine erring child,
And lead me up to Thee
Thro' dangers wild!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

THE YEARS

O years, that passing, bring us age and sorrow,
What gifts have ye for us, that match our loss?
Ever thy promises are for to-morrow . . .
Ever thy gold resolves itself to dross.

Why strive we so, when Time can bring us never
Just compensation? Tho' we give our best,
Naught shall remain to us of our endeavor
Save careworn hearts that fain would be at rest.

Dead hopes, lost youth, lost faith, beyond recalling;
This is the harvest of our barren years;
Dying ambitions, and a little falling
Of glowing sunshine on a sea of tears.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

POVERTY'S LITANY

Help us, Father, or we die!
Unto Thee we lift our cry.
By our helplessness and woe—
By our suffering here below—
By our misery and fear—
By our starving children here—
By our sorrows and our need,
Growth of heartless human greed,—
By our youth that had no zest—
By our age that knows no rest—
By our bitter tears that fall—
Tears for hopes beyond recall—
By our labors, yet uncrowned—
By the night that wraps us 'round—
By our faith that clings to Thee,
Tho' no dawn our sad eyes see,—
Unto Thee we lift our cry—
Help us, Father, or we die!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

UNKNOWN

The night-winds moan around a grass-grown grave,
 'Neath oak-trees tall, far in the forest dim,
Where the owl, weird and ghostly, sits and broods,
 Lone sentinel, upon an ancient limb.

Thro' lacing branches, dank with falling dew,
 The pale moon glimmers fitfully and wan;
Deep in the thicket some lone night-bird 'plains,
 Like a lost soul, from night to weary dawn.

Rude letters carved on a rough, gray stone,
 The name and age of the lone sleeper tell;
This the inscription, wrought by friendly hand—
 “ Nell, Aged Eighteen ”—and then the word,
 “ Farewell! ”

No other word, to tell why all alone
 In the deep forest one so young should rest;
And whose the hand that fashioned the low mound
 In that drear spot, must ever be unguessed.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

A CHILD'S SONG OF SPRING

Wild birds are singing—are singing for gladness—

“ Sweet is the Springtime! ” they joyfully cry;
Bluebird and cardinal, sparrow and robin,
Twitter the words as they fly.

Thick in the meadow the wild flowers are springing,
Pushing their way thro' the tender young grass;
Shy little violets—buttercups golden—
Smile at me now as I pass.

Surely they know me, and know that I love them!
See in them more than so many can see;
They and the trees, the birds and the brooklets, are
Friends and companions to me.

I am so happy! so happy and joyous!
Now I can wander wherever I will;
Wade in the rivulet—run in the meadow—
Gather the ferns by the hill.

Which is the lovelier, Spring or the Summer?
Which do I love best? I hardly can tell;
June is the rose-month, and no other flower
Pleases me half so well.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

But Spring is fair, with its dainty wild flowers,
 Blossoming orchards and warm rains that fall;
And, tho' I love June, and all the glad Summer,
 May is the sweetest of all.

TO SLEEP

Goddess of slumber, bring thy poppy wreath
 And lay it softly on my weary eyes;
So weary that if thy twin brother, Death,
 Instead of thou shouldst come I would not rise,
Nor turn me from the touch of his cold hand.
 Yet sweeter would it be to stray with thee,
With tireless step thro' all thy magic land,
 And feel that for a time my soul was free.
Cast out, O gentle Sleep, all fear and dread,
 And lead me slowly thro' thy slumbrous bower,
Where listless poppy droops its languid head,
 And budding stars burst into golden flower.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

DREAMS

To My Sister

Beneath the green trees sitting,
Deep in the mossy dell,
Of future days unwitting,
We two our dreams would tell.

You craved a castle olden,
With turrets,—and a ghost! . . .
Brave men from goblets golden
Would drink to you a toast.

For you would be the fairest
In all that dream-world land,
And only knight the rarest
Might seek to win your hand.

And you were tall and queenly,
Your hands were white as milk;
You never dressed more meanly
Than cloth-of-gold, or silk.

My dreams were not so stately,
I craved no lover bold;
Nor would I reign sedately
In some grim castle old.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

I was, in all my dreaming,
A "circus lady," gay;
In spangled tarleton gleaming
I dressed myself each day.

My shoes were pink, or azure,
My hose of gayest hue;
I never lacked for leisure
To come and visit you.

My taste was then appalling,
For shall you e'er forget
How I would come a-calling
Dressed in my spangled net?

And you would come to meet me
Clad all in cloth-of-gold,
White hand outstretched to greet me,
In those sweet dreams of old.

But, in that woodland shady,
Dreaming, our dreams seemed true;
I was a "circus lady"—
A "ladye faire" were you.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

“CHIMMIE,” ON SANTA CLAUS

It's ist the funniest thing to me
About old Santa Claus;
You'd think he'd visit fellers
'At ain't got no pa's ner ma's.

Instid o' which, he goes to them
Rich, happy-sort o' boys,
'At don't need anything on earth,
An' loads 'em down 'ith toys.

I'd think old Santa'd be ashamed
To pass us poor kids by,
An' never leave us anything!
It purt' near makes me cry

To see them rich kids runnin' 'round
'Ith sleds, an' drums, an' sich;
Why is it some folks is so poor,
An' others is so rich?

I hung my stockin' by the stove
The night o' Chris'mus Eve,
An' thought I'd git a present, sure;
I couldn't ist believe

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

'At Santa Claus 'ld pass on by
'Thout lookin' in our door—
But he did, an' I ain't goin' to hang
My stockin' up no more!

It ain't no use fer kids like me
To look fer Santa Claus,
'Cause w'y, he's ist fer girls an' boys
'At's got their pa's and ma's.

I've ist got Granny, an' she's old
An' sick, an', 'sides, she's lame,
An' can't give me no Chris'mus gif's—
But I love 'er, ist the same!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

THE DIFFERENCE

When Tommy Jones feels bad, his mother ist
Lets him lay on the bed, an' gives him books
'Ith pitchers in 'em, an' she kisses him,
An' says, " how bad her little Tommy looks! "

An' nen, she gives him grapes an' oranges
T' eat, an' Tommy 'ist can lay an' stuff,
An' have his head tied 'ith a han'kercher,
Until he says he thinks he's well enough

T' set in th' big armchair on th' porch,
An' watch th' hummin'-birds a-flyin' 'bout
Th' honeysuckle, an' 'fore long he says
" He guesses now he's able t' go out."

But when *I'm* sick, *my* ma, she allus says
'At I must take some pills, an' nen, you know,
If I wont swaller 'em, er shut my mouth,
She holds my nose awhile—an' down they go!

An' nen, she says she thinks a mustard draft
Put on my side 'll make me feel all right,
An' so she mixes one, an' I 'ist have
T' put it on, an' keep it there till night.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

An' gee whiz, how it burns! I'd ruther do
Most anything 'an wear that mustard draft,
An' when I said so, once when I was sick,
My ma 'ist turned her head away an' laughed!

But once when I was *real*, sure-nuf sick,
My ma was 'ist as good as she could be,
An' never hardly left me; day an' night,
I knew 'at she was settin' there by me.

An' when my head ached 'ith the fever she
Ist bathed it 'ith cool water, an' she cried,
An' kissed an' kissed me, first time I set up,
An' said " Oh, if my little boy had died! "

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

THE VOYAGE

Two little lads sailed over the sea,
In a ship that was stately and tall:
Said Ned, " Let us go to some strange country! "
Said Tom, " Let us visit them all.
For over the sea are many strange lands,
And many strange sights to behold;
There are rivers of pearls and shining gems,
And shores where the sands are gold! "

So they sailed away, so gallant and gay,
In their ship that was stately and tall,
Till they found the land with golden sand—
The river of pearls, and all.
Then, weary of travel, they sailed for home,
Little thinking what fate should befall,
For before they could reach that far-distant port,
Their vessel capsized in a squall.

But they were not drowned—these brave little lads—
For their ship was a cocoanut shell,
And the sea, a tub of water, you know,
Which answered their purpose well.
For their fancy, alone, could make of the shell
A vessel both stately and tall,
And the river of pearls, the golden sands—
In Fancy they saw them all!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

LANG SYNE

Long, long ago, when life was full of sweetness,
One radiant Summer with no winter cold,
When every day was happy to completeness,
It did not seem we ever could grow old.

And yet, we spoke of age, sometimes, but lightly,
As of a thing a hundred years away;
In childhood, when the sun of life shines brightly,
We cannot look much farther than to-day.

O halcyon days of youth! I still remember
How fair the whole earth seemed, how bright the
flowers,
Which, tho' they vanished with the drear November,
Sprang into joyous bloom with April's showers.

Then, Time with slow and hesitating finger
Told off his rosary of days; now, fast,
Like pearls from loosened cords, they will not linger,
But slip into the ocean of the past.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

LOVE'S YEARNING

Love, do you miss me, e'en as I do you, dear?
Do you remember me, though we're apart?
Sleeping or waking, I'm dreaming of you, dear,
Life of my life, and one love of my heart!

Last night in slumber a vision came to me
Of one who clasped me close to his warm heart,
Whispering sweet names as he kissed me so fondly,
Saying, "Dear love, we shall never more part."

Ah, 'twas too sweet to be aught but a vision
Vanishing with the clear light of the day.
Sadly I wakened to find 'twas a dream, love,
Wakened to know thou wert far, far away.

Dearest, come back! my sad heart is breaking;
Tears to my eyes all unbidden now start.
Come back again to the one who adores thee,
Life of my life, and one love of my heart!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

FATE

I loved him once! My heart was as a flower
That turned to him, my sun, for life and light;
He loved me not, yet still I hoped the hour
Would come when love must win him as its right.

He loves me now—when all my heart is ashes—
Dead ashes, where the flame no more will leap;
An ember, where the fire no longer flashes;
A cold, dead heart, that cannot even weep.

O blind and bitter Fate! denying ever
Our heart's desire until it is too late—
Thus do ye taunt us for our vain endeavor
To conquer thee, oh, blind and bitter Fate!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

YE OLDEN VALENTYNE

O ladye faire, have pitye upon one
Who long before thy lovlye shrine hath knelt!
I falter at thy feete—I am undone;
Thine eyes, soe bright, a deadlye blow have dealt.

Full well I knowe none other is soe faire;
I lyve for thee—all else I doe forgett:
For nothing else in all ye world I care,
Since Love hath ta'en mee prysoner in hys net.

In thys, ye season when ye birds doe mate,
And busy Love doth flye from hearte toe hearte,
I gather courage eke toe try my fate;
Noe longer can I silent bear thys smarte.

Soe, prythee, of thy charitye most sweet,
Toe have compassion on thys hearte of myne,
Which here I laye full lowlye at thy feete,
And take mee, ladye, for thy Valentyne.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

MY LADY

I see my Lady sit and muse;
I know not what her thoughts may be;
I only know, with all my heart
I pray that she may think of me.

My Lady walks among her flowers,
Herself the fairest bloom of all;
I love her! yet I do not dare
To speak to her across the wall.

I only stand and gaze on her,
Looking the love I dare not tell;
(I feel that there is little need,
Because my Lady knows it well.)

She knows it, and she knows full well
The reason why I cannot speak;
So proud and beautiful is she,
'Tis love of her that makes me weak.

My Lady frowns, and all the world—
My world, at least—is dark and drear;
My Lady smiles, and I am glad,
And for a time forget my fear.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

And so, I am or hot or cold,
Just as my Lady's mood may be;
And sad or happy as she wills;
The end of this I cannot see.

But, yet, I think her heart is kind—
With such a face—so fair and sweet—
And some day I shall courage take
And lay my worship at her feet.

BEREFT

Dear love, and art thou gone?
How shall I learn to live my life alone?
How shall I teach my aching heart to wait
Till kindly death shall give me back my own
At Heaven's gate . . .
At far-off Heaven's gate?

And oh, that it should be,
That I lie warm within my chamber here,
Whilst thou, dear love, dost lie so cold, so cold,
Under the yew-tree in the churchyard drear,
Deep in the mold . . .
Deep in the clinging mold!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

LONGING

I would that it were Spring again,
And flowers bloomed upon the lea;
I would that my true-love were here
To tread the pleasant paths with me!

That hand in hand, we two might seek,
Thro' greening woods and mossy bowers,
That hallowed spot where on a day,
We plighted faith amid the flowers.

Deep lies the snow on wood and wold,
Thro' leafless trees the mad winds rave;
No hint of Spring is anywhere . . .
Deep lies the snow upon his grave!

No hint of Spring is in my heart!
Would God that I might happ'ly wake
To find it all a cruel dream,
For, oh, my heart is like to break!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

AT EVENTIDE

I strolled along a quiet country lane
At evening, when the sun was sinking low,
And birds went fluttering homeward to their nests.
The merry crickets chirped a shrill refrain;
Anon I heard the low of distant kine,
As slowly and reluctantly they left
The meadow, where the lush, green clover grew
With wealth of tangled blossoms, red and white.
Wild roses peeping through the dusty hedge,
Coquetting with the gentle evening breeze,
Held frail pink cups to catch the falling dew.
Heavily laden, a belated bee
Flew slowly hiveward, in the gathering dusk;
And going onward for a little way,
To where the hedgerow ended at a gate,
I saw a tiny cottage, vine-embowered,
Nestling amid the peach and apple-trees
That framed it in; and on its step there sat
A woman, rosy-cheeked and dusky-eyed,
Cuddling a baby boy upon her breast.
While numbering each rosy little toe,
Laughing, she told to him the story old,
Of the wee piggy that to market went,

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

And of the little pig that stayed at home.
“ And now,” she said, “ it is your sleepy time;
The baby must not stay awake too late;
The little birdies all have gone to bed,
And Baby, too, must seek the land of Nod.”
So saying, the fond mother kissed her boy
On either cheek, and on the rosebud mouth,
And gently swaying him within her arms,
She, crooning softly, sang this lullaby :

“ Sleep, little one, sleep;
Now the darkness doth creep
O’er the earth, with its shadows
So somber and deep.
My arms shall enfold thee,
No need, then, to weep—
Sleep, little one, sleep.

“ Rest, little one, rest,
Like a bird in its nest,
Warm cuddled to sleep
’Neath a fond mother’s breast.
So sleep thou, secure—
No harm shall molest—
Rest, little one, rest.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

“ Full safely thou’lt lie,
For the angels are nigh;
To guard thee they’ve come from
The far-away sky.
Sleep, sleep till the sun
In the heavens is high;
Sleep, little one, sleep.

“ Thy bright eyes are closed,
And thy cheek like a rose,
Rests now on my bosom,
In peaceful repose.
God keep thee, my baby!
Thy future, who knows?
God guard thee and keep.”

The song was ended, and the baby slept,
So, rising, the fond mother passed within,
And I upon my way. The night drew on,
But still a glory lingered in the west—
Blendings of deepest amethyst and rose,
That slowly fading left the sky a deep,
Dark blue, from which the little, twinkling stars,
Like fairy lamps shone down upon the earth.
So, thro’ the pleasant twilight home I came,
With peace within my soul, and heart made glad
By all the quiet beauty of the night.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

MEMORIES

Shades of dead days, long departed,
Thickly you hover about me,
Asking remembrance, and token
That none of you shall be forgotten;
Telling of joys that you brought—
Telling of sorrows you brought me;
Joys that were lasting as sweet,
Sorrows that vanished as quickly
As dew from the heart of a wild rose,
Wind-tossed in the bright summer-sun.
Shades of dear days long departed,
This I can promise you truly,
None of you shall be forgotten
While life and memory last me.
Others may think you were dull—
Smile at my tender remembrance—
But in my heart you shall be
Shrined with all things that are sacred,
Tender, and holy and true.
Nothing that comes to me now
Brings the pure joy that you brought me;
Brings the same feeling of gladness
That oft you awoke in my soul.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Why this is so, who can tell?
Often I question and wonder,
Often I ask of my heart,
“ Why do you still ever backward
Turn, to the Summers long vanished?
And why are you, heart, then so sad,
When dreaming of scenes far away,
That I loved in the Spring of my life? ” . . .
Days when my spirit was glad,
And sang as a bird in my bosom . . .
Is it because nevermore
The beauty and fire of the Summer
Can bring to my heart what is gone?
Never, ah, never, can bring me
The youth that the fleet years have stolen?
Never, ah, never, can give me
The faces I love that are vanished!
Never can bring me the roses
That blew in a garden I loved!

.

Oh, for the Summers of yore,
That my heart shall remember forever!
When all the glad earth seemed an Eden
Of fragrant and beautiful blooms;
Of fruits and of flowers as fair

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

As Eden itself could have held . . .
And the fields! the broad fields where the wheat
grew,
Stretching out in a vista unbroken,
A billowy ocean of verdure,
Its emerald blades all a-glitter,
And darker and deeper in color,
Where the wind rippled over its surface . . .
Or the fields when the wheat was all golden,
And the harvesters gathered to reap it!
In dozens they came with their scythes,
In the earliest light of the day—
Bare-throated, and mingling their songs
With the pipe of the birds, that for joy
Were caroling hymns to the morn. . . .
Oh, but to see them once more!
Oh, but to hear once again
The ring of the scythes in the field;
Only one moment to hear
The bobolink sing in the clover
As they sang in the Summers I mourn!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

THE DAME AND THE MAID

In her cot on the grim mountain-side
The Dame sat a-spinning; the Maid
Stood a-near, and she questioned the Dame.
“ I have read of the World, and of love,
Yet of neither I know,” so she said,
“ For the mountain-side here is my World,
And love—that I never have known.
But you, who are old, and have lived
In the valley far yonder unfurled—
In the valley below these dim heights,
Where few strangers come; you, I say,
Who have lived long, and, doubtless, have loved,—
Tell me now of that world far away.”
“ Yes, yes,” quoth the Dame, “ even so!
I lived in the world, long ago . . .
Lived and loved, long ago! long ago! ” . . .
She ceased from her spinning and sat
For a time with her thoughts far away;
Till the Maiden impatiently cried:
“ But love? What is love? Can you tell? ”
And musing, thus answered the Dame:
“ Love? ’Tis a flower so frail
That a cold wind may rob it of life;

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Where the sun shineth, there it blooms best.
Yet again, 'tis a blossom that grows
In the shade, where the sun seldom shines;
There, it blooms, giving all, asking naught.
Yea, tho' scorned and neglected, it lives,
And yields up its perfume unsought. . . .
And love, it is sometimes a fire,
That burns in the heart like a flame;
That burns it to ashes, and leaves
But a cold, empty bosom fore'er. . . .
And love is a sorrow," she said,
" But a sorrow so sweet one might die
Content to have tasted of it. . . .
Yea, and bitter, it sometimes may be,
As waters of Marah! " she said.
" And some for the white rose of love
Have plucked but the red rose of lust;
Ah, cruel the thorns on that rose! "
" Why, love is most strange! " cried the Maid,
" If indeed, it be all that you say!
And which was the love that you found?
Was it cruel or sad? was it sweet?
Was it bitter? Ah, tell me, I pray! "
" It was all of these things," said the Dame,
" It was cruel and bitter, yet sweet,

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Ah, sweet as the honey-comb is!
'Twas a flame that consumed me, and yet,
'Twas a flower that bloomed in my heart;
'Twas a music that sang in my soul—
A fountain that watered the drear,
Sandy waste of my life. All of this,
Was the love that I found in my youth! ”
“ Yet, 'twas cruel, you say,” said the Maid,
“ And bitter; and burned as a flame
In your heart. Were it not better, then,
To have never known love and its woes? ”
But, “ Nay,” cried the Dame, “ think not so!
I have lived—for to love is to live—
And to miss it, is not to have lived;
Its bitter no longer I taste,
But its sweetness remains with me still.
I sit by the fire and spin,
And I dream of the days that are gone,
And I dream of the love of my youth;
And, times, he seems here by my side,
And his words sound again in my ear
As plain as can be; and I know
He is waiting to welcome me home. . . .
I remember our quarrel and its cause,
A trifle it seems to me now,

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

A cloud that a word might have swept
From our sky—but I said not that word.
I said in my pride, “ He shall come
And sue for my pardon, and then,
I’ll forgive him, and all will be well!
Ah, me! it was never to be.
He left me in anger that day,
In anger he galloped away,
And I watched him with tears in my eyes—
With tears—but too proud to call out
And tell him the truth . . . and at night
They brought him home dead. Well away!
But if he had lived, I know well
That his heart would have melted to me,
And my love would have vanquished my pride,
Our quarrel would have ended, full soon,
And our lives been united at last.
And so, when I think of the past
’Tis the sweet I remember, my dear,
And seldom the sorrow and pain.
For past are the stress and the storm,
The grief of that far-away time
That once was so heavy to bear.
And, happy and peaceful, I wait. . . .
I am old—and it cannot be long! ”

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

TOO LATE!

They stood beside the coffin and looked down
Upon the still, white face, reposing there;
Tears dimmed their eyes, but she who all her life
Had craved for sympathy and found it not,
Lay now with closed eyes—nor saw, nor heard.
They touched the poor, tired hands, that rested now
From life-long toil; how often she had yearned
For kindly pressure of a friendly hand!
But now, all unresponsive, coldly clasped,
Her own lay on her breast. She heeded not.
And one there was, who whispered in her ear
Fond words and sad; and murmured thro' thick sobs,
“ O love, forgive! forgive! for I was wrong! ”
But she, who thro' long years had wept and prayed
For his return, lay still, and answered not.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

DE PROFUNDIS

Out of the depths they cry to Thee, O Lord!
The toiling, suffering masses of the world.
Out of the depths of misery and want;
Out of the depths of hearts that pain has wrung,
An agonizing cry ascends to Thee!
Lord, in Thy mercy hear and answer them.
Earth casts them down; they reach tired hands to
Thee—

Hands, tired with toiling thro' long, weary years.
Mutely they plead for help that never comes;
Dumbly they yearn for some sweet time of rest;
Death, only, brings it them.

Have pity, Lord!

My heart is heavy, and my soul grows sick,
When I walk forth where misery rears its head,
And see the patient faces of the poor,
Haggard and worn, and old before their time,
And hear the voices of their little ones
Who ask for bread, and often ask in vain.
The children! oh, the children! Pity them,
Born thus to suffering and toil and sin;
To ignorance, and its twin brother, crime!
They did not choose to live, and, undesired,

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

They came into this hard and cruel world;
They know not why they live, nor why they die,
Nor why they starve with plenty all about.
Like beasts that perish, they endure, nor know
The reason why they suffer. Help them, Lord!
Are not they, too, Thy little ones, oh, Christ?
And help those helpless ones whose feeble cry
Few heed upon this earth; the multitude
Who toil forever, that the idle few
May live exempt from toil, and nothing lack;
Who starve from day to day, from year to year,
That that same few may live luxuriously.
Dumb beasts of burden, bending 'neath the yoke
Of their oppressors; manhood well nigh crushed
From their poor stunted form; their intellect
Dwarfed, like their bodies, and their only thought—
How shall they and their wretched offspring live.
Life narrowed down to that! No other hope—
A mere existence, barren of all joy.
Ah, God! must it be so? Thro' all the years—
Thro' all the ages—must some toil in vain?
Ah, work is good for all, but not such work
As cripples mind and body, and destroys
The God-like leaven that is born in all.
And what reward have these? what guerdon woe

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

By all their years of ceaseless, grinding toil?
Rest in old age . . . a peaceful afterglow
Illumining their day of rest well won?
Shall they surrounded by their children sit;
Their children's children playing at their knee?
Shall they say, " I have toiled and labored long,
But now I rest, and when I shall go hence—
Let it be soon or late—there is a spot,
My very own, where I may sleep in peace! "

Dear God! how oft dire poverty, and want,
And ignorance, have made their children thieves,
And murderers, and harlots!

Cursed from birth—
Yea, in their mother's womb predestined to
A life of crime. Alas! that this should be!
And thou dost know, no rest shall crown their age—
No light illumine their pathway to the grave;
But they shall toil, while any strength is theirs,
Bending beneath the burden of their life
Till happ'ly, death shall lift their weary load.
If they outlive their usefulness; if their
Poor, toilworn hands no longer have the strength
To labor, they are branded with the name—
The shameful name—of pauper! This, the world
Will give them for their years of faithful toil,

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

And, at the last, 'mid others of their kind,
A weed-grown grave in some drear potter's field.
O Mother Earth! who in thy fruitful womb
Breedest all things of which mankind hath need,
Is there not bread and fruit for those who toil?
Largess thou givest from thy boundless store;
Shall not thy children equal take of thee?
Why should a few hoard up thy garnered wealth,
Whilst others go thro' life with empty hands?
Yet ever thus the strong despoil the weak,
Batten and thrive upon the misery
Their lust and greed creates.

Almighty God!

Hearest Thou not the groans of the oppressed?
Seest Thou not the hopeless tears that fall
From eyes grown dim with weeping and with work?
Hearest Thou not the prayers that from the whole,
Wide world the wretched daily raise to Thee?
“ How long, O Lord, how long! ” they cry, and wait
Thine answer, which so long has been delayed.
Would Thou mightst speak to men from out high
Heaven,
As in the days of old 'tis said Thou didst;
So that the ears, fast closed unto the prayers
Of the afflicted, needs must hear Thy voice.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Speak, then, we pray, that all the world may hear;
Strike down the heavy hand of grasping Greed;
Strike off the chains that millions wear to-day;
Lift up the struggling bondman of the world;
Say to each crushed and hopeless son of toil,
“Stand up, oh, Man, and claim thy heritage—
Freedom, and goodly share of all the wealth
Thy labor doth create! It is thy due.”
Speak out, O God, that thoughtless ones may think;
That careless ones may note the harm they do;
That hearts with selfishness encrusted now
May beat with sympathy, and all the world
Own and proclaim the Brotherhood of Man!

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

REMORSE

The night is desolate; low-hanging clouds
Disconsolately weep. My heart is sad,
Is filled with anguish bitterer than death! . . .
Let me stand here beneath the swaying trees
Whose writhing arms uplift to the dark sky
As if in supplication . . . Let the wind
Buffet me as it will, and let the chill
Rain fall upon me. Would that it could quench
This all-consuming fire within my soul! . . .
I cannot sit where cheerful firelight gleams,
Where lights are flashing, and where careless words
Fall on my tortured ear; I best accord
With darkness, storm, and spirits of the night.
God! will this wretched mem'ry never die?
Shall there for me be nevermore on earth
Forgetfulness and peace? but evermore
The vision of that Face, so still and white,
In horror frozen! . . . Lips that dumb with grief
Spake not,—nor cursed me—cowering in fear,
And shame that burned me as a white-hot iron!
Let me forget, dear God! Let me forget!
Let me at night lie down to dreamless sleep;
Let me at morn awake to feel once more

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Joy in the new-born day . . . Let me forget!
O dire, accusing conscience! not for me
Forgetfulness, whilst thou hast power to sting!
What need is there for hell in any life
That may come after this one? . . . Doth not hell
Burn in my heart and blister in my soul,
When realizing all the heavy weight
Of mine iniquity? Unworthy me!
False to all truth, and falsest to myself.
Where are my dreams of nobleness and worth?
Where are the splendid hopes of other years?
Gone! gone! And only this mad pain that throbs
Within my burning brain and in my heart,
Is left to take their place. O dread Remorse!
And shalt thou walk with me forevermore?

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

TWO WOMEN

There was a woman lived her lonely life
Bereft of every joy that makes life dear;
Hard was her lot and full of petty cares,
Poor was her home, and lacking in all things
That might have lent it grace, or made it fair
To look upon. Use, only, flourished there,
For beauty ever yields to usefulness
Where coarse minds rule—and one was master here
To whom the woman might not raise her voice
In argument against his chosen way.
Yet, she loved beauty; loved each tinted cloud
That floated o'er the azure of the sky;
Loved every flower with such a tender love,
Passionate, wistful, full of vague regret
That they so soon must wither, fade and die.
And like a lovely flower, choked with weeds,
Growing forgotten in some lonely field,
So grew this woman's soul in its cramped space,
Reaching out blindly to that fairer world
Which in dreams only it had ever known;
Sad and dissatisfied, and dimly pained
By all the coarse, unlovely things she saw.
She had no time to seek the beautiful;

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

No time to watch the budding flowers unfold;
No time to see the sun sink to his rest,
Leaving the west a flood of golden light;
No time to see the twinkling stars come out,
Or mark the silent beauty of the night
When o'er the wooded hill the silver moon
Rose slowly, gemming every dew-wet blade.
She toiled from day to day, from year to year,
No kindly word to cheer her on the way,
No sympathy to feed her starving heart,
No books, no pictures—nothing fair or bright
To break the dull, grey level of her life.
Yet, sometimes, bending o'er her weary tasks,
Another world unfolded to her view,
A world in which all things were beautiful,
Where she might fold her hands and rest
awhile.

In dreams she wandered in this fairy land,
In waking dreams she murmured to herself:
“And I shall have a pretty cottage then,
And all about it lovely flowers shall bloom,
And o'er the porch the cypress vine shall climb,
And morning-glories, blue as any sky.
And roses, oh, I'll have a lot of them;
I love them so! I often wish I had

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Just one small bush—I need not tend it much.
And I'll have pictures: pictures of the sea
And white-sailed ships, and pictures of strange
lands,
And of fair gardens where rare flowers blow.
And I shall go into the far, wide world,
Into the cities, bright and beautiful,
Where women do not toil from morn till night
Like beasts of burden but have rest and love! ”

.
Thus would she build fair castles in the air,
Fill up her barren life with pleasant dreams;
So only could she bear her lot and live.

.
Far off, another woman lived her life,
Amid the city's dust and strife and smoke;
Early and late beside a clanging loom
She toiled to win her children's daily bread.
She might not rest for only one short hour
Tho' heart and brain grew weary unto death.
And standing by her loom, day after day,
She wove strange thoughts into the growing cloth,
Thoughts sad and somber as her dreary life.
And wistful yearning sometimes filled her soul

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

To see green fields of wheat or waving corn,
To smell sweet clover and to hear the song
Of glad wild birds.

“ Oh, God! ” she inly moaned,
“ Let me but stand beneath Thy free, blue sky
Once more, and breathe the sweet, pure air of
heaven.

I stifle here! My brain reels and my soul
Grows sick with longing and with hope denied.
Let me but see green grass and common flowers
That bloom and die in lonely wayside nooks.
Long years ago, a happy, careless child,
I ran about the fields and meadow-lands,
Playing all day by wood and wold and stream.
Ah, well do I remember those fair scenes—
The simple, homely life, the fruits, the flowers,
The wood hard by—the shady, winding lane
With pale wild roses hedging either side,
And in the fields, among the waving wheat,
The red wild poppies flaunting in the breeze.
O sweet to see those peaceful scenes once more,
After long years of weary, stifling toil,
Shut in from God’s free sunshine and the sight
Of His blue sky. O better far to lie
In dreamless slumber underneath green turf,

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

With simple wild flowers nodding overhead,
And peaceful quiet brooding all about,
Than thus to live, where life is worse than death! ”

.
Thus made she moan, nor dreamed that in that same
Fair country that she sighed for women live—
Yea, live and die—with only time for toil.

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

MAGDALEN

Here where the cold winds buffet me about,
Half hidden in this doorway I will stand,
Searching the face of every passing man,—
Hoping that one may turn and smile on me
With invitation in his lustful eyes.

.

My heart is sad to-night, my courage fails,
And but for gnawing hunger I could not
Endure to stand here in the wind-swept street,
Forlorn and wretched, waiting for my prey.
Last night I waited long, but no one came
On whom I dared to smile with wanton eyes,
Seeking his favor with those shameless arts
Necessity has taught me. Late I crept
Into that dismal place, I call my home,
In grimmest mockery of that sacred word:
Hungry and cold, 'twas long before I slept,
For when my weary lids would near go down,
Pain racked me into consciousness again.
Howbeit, I slept, and sleeping, had a dream;
A vision of the Christ, or so it seemed,
Came close, and stood beside me where I lay.
Sweet was His face, all pitiful and kind;

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Sorrowful, too, and full of brooding love;
Like to a mother, grieving for a child
Who long has left her, wandering afar—
Unmindful of her love that never sleeps,
Unmindful of her heart that aches for him,
Yearning unceasingly for his return;
So looked the Christ. I could not speak, but lay
Sore, sore afraid, and shamed in all my soul.
But then, He smiled, and all my fear was gone;
He spoke, and sweetest music was His voice;
“ Daughter! ” He said, “ I know your wretched life;
I know the bitter wrong that sent you first
Out in the cold world, helpless and alone;
Hot lust that spared you not, but masked itself
Beneath the guise of true and tender love;
Hot wrath and bitter scorn, that drove you forth
Outcast, into a world where not one hand
Reached forth to lift you up, and not one soul,
Kind and compassionate, did plead with thee
To save thee from despair. So, step by step,
Thy ruin hath been wrought. But woe to him
Who for his evil pleasure spoiled thy life!
And woe to them who loved thee not enough
To guard and cherish thee from harm and ruth.
And bitter woe to those who call themselves

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

My children and my followers, yet shrink
In fearful scorn from you, and such as you;
Have they so read amiss the words I spoke?
Have they not understood my sacrifice,
That they will render thus my death in vain?
Are they so sinless—they who lie full soft
In downy beds, while you lie cold and hard?
They who have never known what hunger meant—
They who have feasted while you starved, and
 laughed
While you have wept!—temptation never known;
Surrounded all their lives with loving care,
Whilst you have buffeted the world alone?
Surely, they need that I should come again—
Should mingle in their midst and stand for once
On the cold altars they have built to me,
But where they worship other gods full oft,
Shutting me out among those lowly ones
Who durst not worship in so fine a place.
But if I came—and came as once I did—
Poor and unknown, and bidding them renounce
Their darling sin, and all their pride and pomp,
Teaching as once I taught, the selfsame creed,
Would they not laugh my earnest words to scorn?
Would they not crucify me once again?

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

Ah, woe to them—the blind that will not see!
Long since, an erring woman, bathed in tears,
In fear and shame, knelt lowly at my feet;
Her, I forgave, and bade her sin no more.
But you, my daughter, if I counsel so,
How can I hope that you will heed my words? ”
He ceased to speak, yet smiled upon me still,
A smile of mournful tenderness, and then,
Ere I could ask of Him what I must do
To change my sinful life, there came some sound
Up from the street and wakened me. So passed
This vision of the Christ. The cold, gray dawn
Crept in my window, day had come again,
And all my misery was with me still.
Yet all the day I seemed to see His face,
And seemed to hear the music of His voice,
Love-laden, as it fell upon my ear.
It haunts me still, e’en while I shiver here
In the cold street—still waiting for my prey.
God! God! I cry, is there no place for me
In all this city, save upon the street?
Is there no way to live, save on my shame?
Is there no food to stop this gnawing pain—
No fire, where I may sit and warm myself—
No love, whereby to thaw my frozen heart?

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

A lurking demon whispers in my ear:
“ Think not of God! Think only how to gain
The eye and favor of yon man, who comes
Blithely along, well-wrapped from winter cold,
Well-fed, well-clothed and, as one well may guess,
With money in his purse. Look not so sad—
Smile and look gay, altho’ thy soul be sick;
Men hate sad faces, tales of want and woe.
Hold up your head, with bold and wanton eyes,
Look into eyes as wanton and as bold;
Laugh brazenly, and smile with painted lips,
Tho’ never mirth stirs in your wretched heart!
Stifle your feelings, breathe into his ears
Light prattle, that shall seem as if it comes
Warm from a heart full happy and content! ”
Vain, vain! I cannot smile, my arts are gone;
And mingling with the tempter’s hissing tones
That other voice I hear: “ Her I forgave—
And bade her sin no more.” To sin no more!
But I—how shall I sin no more and live?
Well, is life necessary? Need I live?
Am I so happy that I should prolong
The misery of living? Death is kind!
He giveth rest to those who find it not
In all this weary world; to those whose feet

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

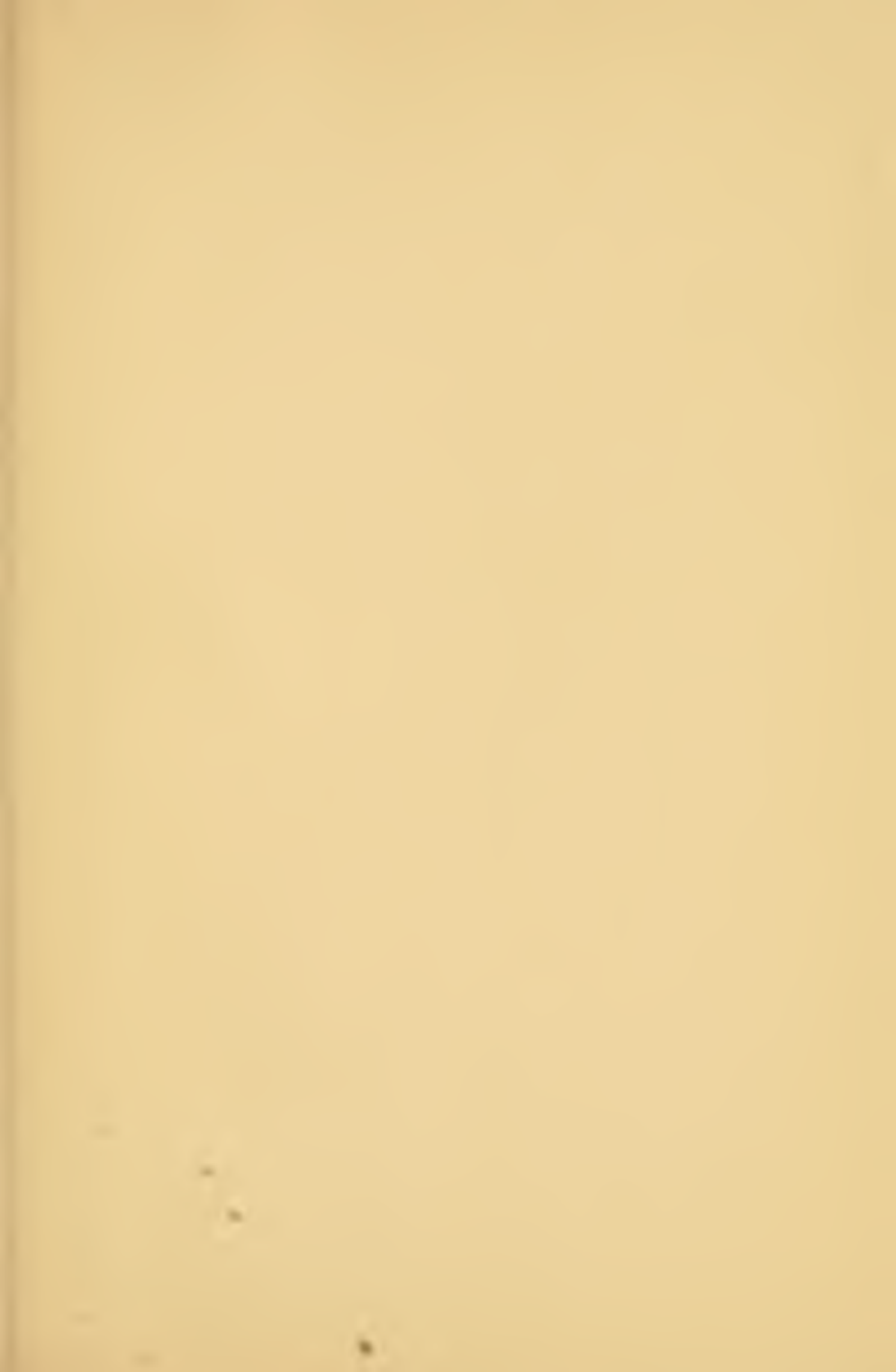
Are tired with walking over stony ways,
He giveth rest. Sad hearts that long have ached
Cease from their pain beneath his magic touch.
“ O cruel death! ” cry they, who never knew
How far more cruel life can be, nor felt
How true a friend is death, to those who have
Not one true friend in all the whole, wide world.
And he is near to-night; I feel his hand,
Cold, cold upon my heart, and on my face
The flutter of his icy breath. . . . I know
That if I do but sit and wait his time—
Not long—that he will take my hand in his
And lead me on, into the Silent land. . . .
O hasten, death! kind friend, and only friend
Whom now I look for, take me to thy realm!
Darkness enfolds me—cold and colder still
The night has grown. But now I see a star,—
Softly it pierces thro’ the midnight gloom,
Brighter and brighter still, and now it grows
Into a luminous halo round about
The grand, majestic head of One who comes
And stands beside me. Ah! I know Him now!
The Christ! it is the Christ! O Lord, forgive!
There was no other way—no other way! . . .
Tho’ I have sinned, yet I have suffered, too;

A HANDFUL OF AUTUMN LEAVES

O I have suffered much! Forgive me, Lord!
How sweet His smile! . . . But, hark! I seem to hear
Music divine, and on its glorious swell
My soul is borne. No longer am I cold,
Or gnawed with hunger—all my pain is gone.
What words are these that fall upon my ear?
“ Neither do I condemn thee—sin no more! ”
And chanted by a thousand thousand tongues
Sweet words that I have heard long, long ago,
Are wafted on the air: “ And there shall be
No night, and God shall wipe all tears away,
And there shall be no sorrow there, nor pain.”
Ah, sweet the music of their voices—sweet
The promise of those words. It cannot be
For me—that happy land of which they sing.
Yet still the Saviour smiles into my face—
Tender, benign, and reaching forth His hand,
“ Daughter,” He says, “ thy sins forgiven be! ”
And louder, sweeter swells that perfect strain—
Sweeter and sweeter still; and now I hear
The rustle of innumerable wings.
“ Come up! come up! ” the voices chant, “ and see
The beauty of the Lord, and taste His love! ”

.
And borne on wings of love, my spirit mounts
To bliss unknown—undreamed of. Earth, farewell!





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